



Friends of Wimbledon Park

Nick Steiner, Chairman, Friends of Wimbledon Park Speech for planning meeting 5 September 2013

We strongly oppose this plan for the following reasons:

Firstly:

The report says, incorrectly, that TfL has used this area for a decade and that attempts to grow grass there have failed. In fact, until very recently this was a lovely grassy area that only became damaged because the council gave cars access – a move that should have had planning permission but did not.

It's now very convenient for your officers to tell you "we might as well make it official as the ground is ruined anyway." Don't fall for this cynical ploy.

To "regularise" the conversion from grassland to hard surface amounts to granting retrospective permission for an illegal development.

Secondly:

There is no charge for parking and only minimal, unverified research, and therefore no way to evaluate the true scale of demand.

UDP Policy L.6 allows the loss of open space only where this is to a use that is ancillary to the recreational, cultural or social use of the open space. Use of parking by non-park users doesn't qualify.

And yet we know this is exactly what's happening. Word is spreading that there's now extra free parking, attracting commuters, shoppers, builders and those reluctant to pay for on-street spaces.

If people *can* park close to facilities they will. That doesn't mean they *should*. The report dismisses all the other options for drivers: Wimbledon Park Road car park, which often stands almost empty, as well as on-street parking nearby.

Thirdly:

The report describes the park as Grade II listed. In fact it's a Grade II*, and that star is crucially important, denoting Wimbledon Park as a site of national importance, designed by leading 18th century landscaper Capability Brown.

The application area is protected by adopted local policies as Public Open Space, Metropolitan Open Land, Historic Park and Conservation Area. These policies require that changes should protect, conserve, improve and enhance the area.



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What's more, Transport Policies CS18, 19 & 20 and LU.4, seek to discourage car journeys and encourage other modes of travel.

You've been given little or no help in assessing the proposals against these policies. The proposal infringes them all, leaving you open to legal challenge if you approve.

Fourthly:

When you consider user demand you are required to consider *all* users. The vast majority of visitors enjoy free, unstructured pursuits – picnicking, kicking a ball around, jogging or walking the dog.

By allowing more and more vehicles into the park you spoil the very thing that's attracting people in the first place.

It's wrong to say that activities will be harmed without extra parking. When the car park is closed (because of the tennis championships or Bonfire Night), people still flock there in their thousands. The park is well served by two Tube stations and good bus routes.

We ask you to fairly consider all users in the planning balance, not just those who pay for activities.

Lastly:

This car park extension has happened by stealth. Public notices were poorly displayed and there's been no public meeting. You can be sure your voters will voice their displeasure at the ballot box if they feel they are being ignored. People demand and deserve a well thought out, progressive vision for the park, not this travesty of a scheme.

We're urging you to find a better way: to do proper research, to trial payment for parking, to encourage sustainable transport methods and above all to think imaginatively about the future.

Do you really want it to be your legacy as councillors that you allowed this beautiful landscape to be blighted by cars for future generations?

We urge you to do the right thing: protect it, as so many local people are relying on you to do.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.